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ERIC GARCETTI
MAYOR

October 20, 2021

Honorable Members of the
Arts, Parks, Health, Education, and Neighborhoods Committee
c/o City Clerk, Room 395, City Hall
200 North Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

SUBJECT: NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL AFTER ACTION REPORT

Honorable Members:

SUMMARY

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Office of the City Clerk (City Clerk) was directed by City Council to develop a method where Neighborhood Council (NC) Elections could take place while adhering to social distancing protocols. As such, the City Clerk conducted the 2021 NC Elections through Vote-By-Mail (VBM) only. This included the development of citywide election procedures, new deadlines, candidate filing, ballot development, VBM operations, ballot drop box coordination, and the ballot tally/canvass for 76 NCs, all in a remote setting.

The City Clerk identified many successes as well as obstacles with the implementation of the all-VBM process. While the City Clerk was able to address many of those issues, we look forward to this offseason as an opportunity to work with NCs, the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment (DONE), City Attorney, and Council Offices on identifying and improving the election process.

RECOMMENDATION

Note and file this report inasmuch as the report is submitted for information purposes, only.

BACKGROUND

The Department completed several critical tasks in preparation for potentially 99 NC VBM Elections. The team updated the online candidate filing portal to make it easier for candidates to submit their applications. All candidates were required to provide identification and any applicable documentation to establish their eligibility for their

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respective board seat. Staff provided candidate requirements and support over the phone, email, Zoom meetings, and through the City Clerk's NC Election website.

Additionally, City Clerk staff participated in eight virtual regional candidate workshops to show candidates how to enter their applications into the portal, answer candidate filing questions, and provide information about the VBM election model.

In developing the VBM model for NC Elections, staff also created an online VBM portal in English and Spanish, containing voter requirements from each NC's bylaws for stakeholders to request a ballot. VBM paper applications in multiple languages were available for non-English stakeholders or those who did not have access to the internet.

Election Days were moved to Tuesdays to better accommodate mail service schedules. In addition, following statewide election models, NC ballots were only required to be postmarked by Election Day, and received up to 10 calendar days thereafter, to be included in the tally.

The City Clerk partnered with 57 community-based organizations across the City to act as service providers by providing English and Spanish VBM paper applications to the unhoused, monolingual speakers, youth, seniors, the disabled, and those without mail services nor access to digital technology.

Finally, the City Clerk established an agreement with the County of Los Angeles to use their election ballot drop boxes for NC Elections, as an alternative to mailing in ballots. Nearly 20 percent of voters utilized the ballot drop boxes to return their voted ballots.

CHALLENGES

During the 2021 NC Election season, staff encountered a few administrative challenges which had some impact on election operations.

Vote-By-Mail (VBM)

The all-VBM process, in general, posed challenges for stakeholders, especially those without access to digital technology nor reliable mail services. The City Clerk assisted voters via email, phone, and virtual meetings in completing the VBM registration. Stakeholders also vocalized their frustrations and concerns about providing sensitive documentation online to prove their stakeholder status. This has historically been and will continue to be a problem when determining eligibility requirements for each NC, as these are pursuant to each NC's bylaws.

Voters also expressed concerns regarding the delays in receiving their mailed ballots. In response, the team drove ballot packets directly to the main/Central Post Office daily, in an attempt to expedite mailing. Additionally, staff hand-delivered ballots to voters' homes when the window to mail out and receive their ballot was too narrow.

The City Clerk had a limited number of staff to oversee all aspects of the NC Election process. Approving VBM applications required additional time to explain voter requirements to stakeholders, especially in NCs where documentation was required. Additional staff were pulled from various sections and trained to process applications for each region, along with preparing and mailing ballot packets to stakeholders. In all, staff reviewed over 30,000 VBM applications and mailed out 26,822 ballot packets.

Post-Election Feedback

In late August, DONE and the City Clerk hosted a series of feedback sessions to obtain input from stakeholders on how the NC Election process can be improved. Some of the prominent recommendations shared by stakeholders were:

- Simplifying the candidate and voter registration processes;
- Clarifying voter requirements, including acceptable documentation; and
- Providing a VBM voting option, along with at-poll elections.

As a result, the City Clerk identified four areas for review:

- Hiring additional as-needed staff for administrative support, VBM processing, and staffing the polls;
- Streamlining the NC Candidate and VBM portal to be more user friendly;
- Increasing NC participation in NC Election development; and
- Reassessing timelines in response to United States Postal Service (USPS) mailing delays.

Community Interest Stakeholder Definition

The Community Interest Stakeholder definition was revised to provide more clarity to the definition; however, it disqualified some organizations traditionally recognized by NCs. Organizations are now required to provide proof of existence for a 12-month period prior to an election as well as providing proof of being an established brick and mortar. As many organizations moved to an online presence only, this disqualified some who would have otherwise been deemed a legitimate organization through their documented online presence and impact in the community it served. This may continue to pose a problem when determining an organization's legitimacy under the new requirements as more and more organizations opt for an online, virtual presence only.

STATISTICS (Exhibit 1)

Candidate Filing

The number of candidates who *applied* to run for a board seat *and were certified* increased 4.5 percent, from 1,665 in 2019 to 1,706 in 2021.

In 2021 the City Clerk certified 94 percent of candidates who filed to run as a Board Member. Those who were not certified were as a result of missing the documentation necessary to qualify for the office.

There were 15 NC Elections suspended due to a lack of candidates/competitive races, and therefore seated their boards through the affirmation process.

Voter Turnout

As stated earlier, the City Clerk mailed out 26,822 ballot packets and received 17,577 valid ballot packets from 76 NCs, for a 65.6 percent turnout. Although the request for ballots were high, the actual turnout decreased in 2021 by 8 percent in comparison to 2019.

Finally, as a point of interest, an overwhelming 76 percent of voters qualified under the “Live” stakeholder category. A stakeholder who qualifies under “Live,” is one who provides proof or affirms, under penalty of perjury, that they reside within a specific NC.

CONCLUSION

The City Clerk is currently developing the 2023 NC Elections budget with both at-polls and VBM in mind to allow for greater participation and turnout.

As always, the City Clerk is committed to providing excellent service to the stakeholders of the City and will continue to work closely with NCs, DONE, and the City Attorney’s Office on improving the NC Election process. City Clerk staff will continue to work collaboratively with its partners to find solutions to the obstacles outlined in this report and ensure greater inclusivity and opportunities to participate in NC Elections for the City of Los Angeles stakeholders.

Sincerely,

Signed with ClerkSign



Oct 20, 2021 11:33 AM

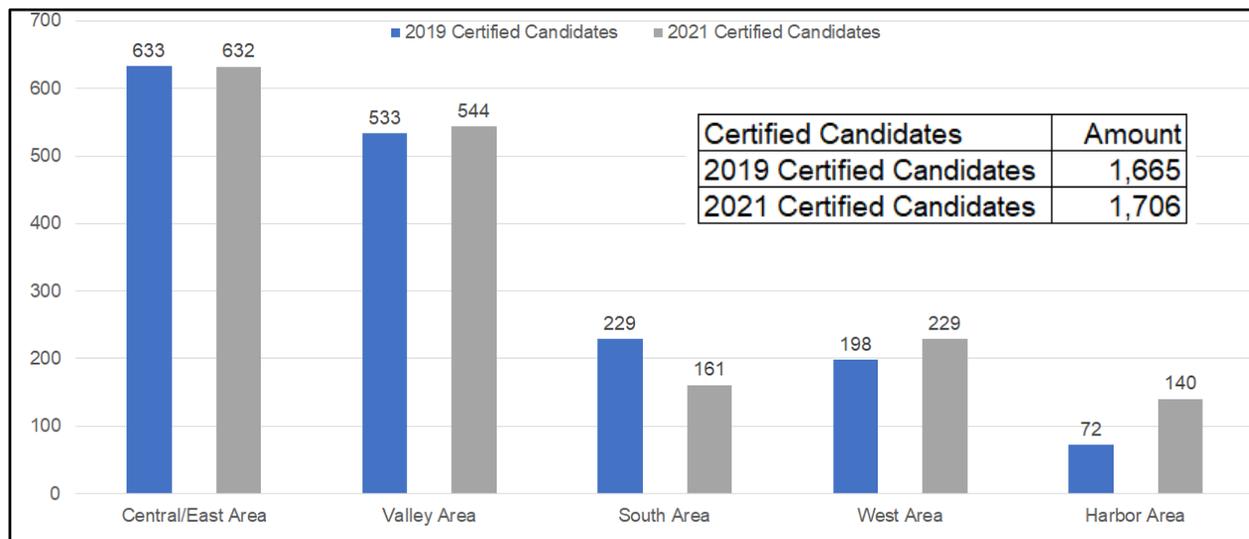
Holly L. Wolcott
City Clerk

Attachments

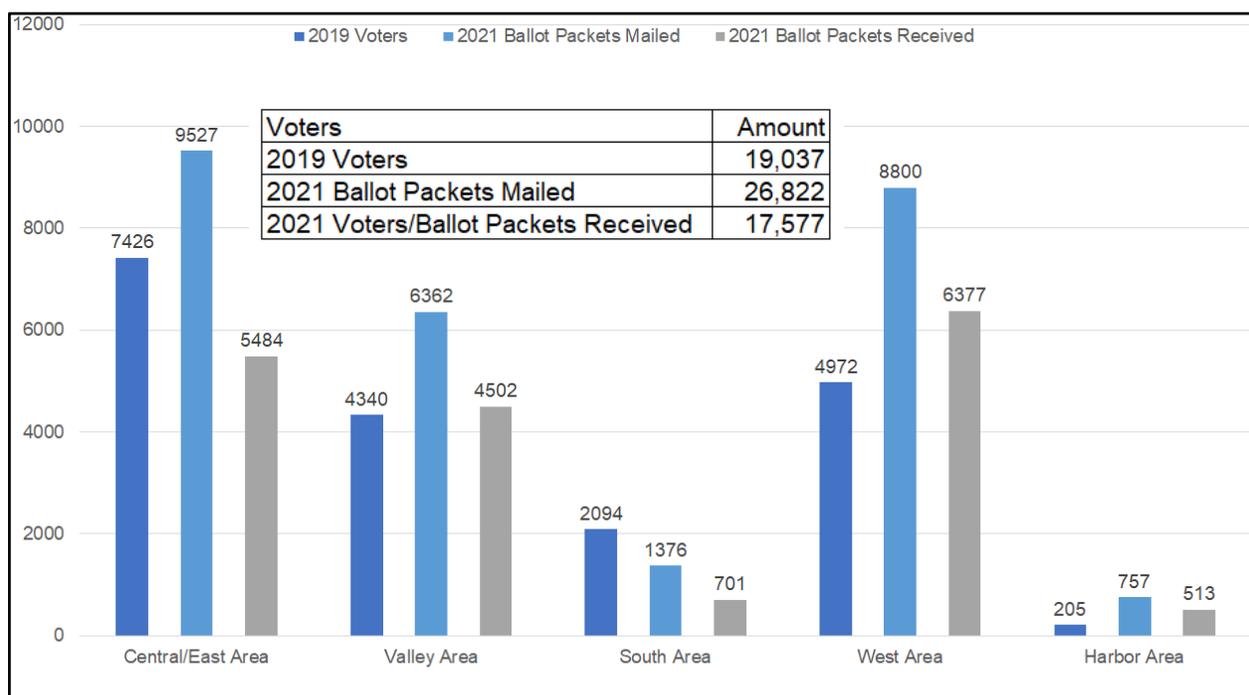
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EXE-034-21

2021 NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL ELECTIONS CANDIDATE AND VOTER BREAKDOWN

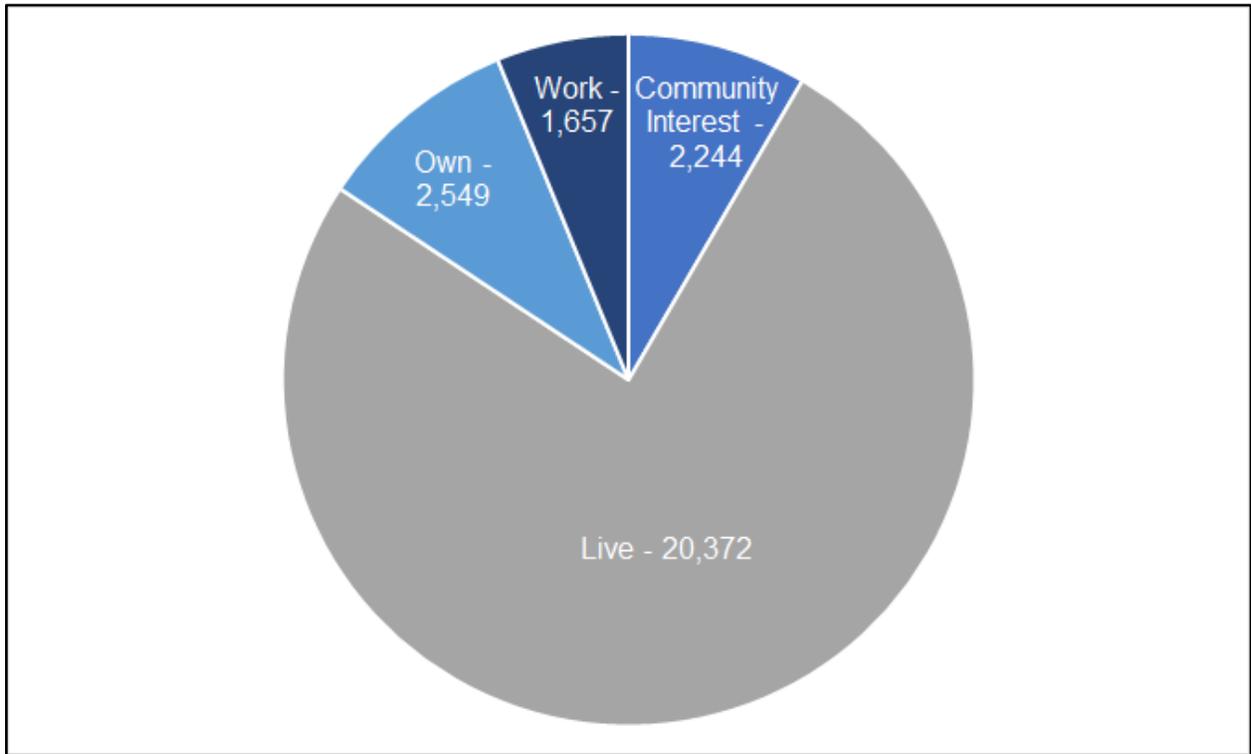
NUMBER OF CERTIFIED CANDIDATES



NUMBER OF VOTERS



VOTER TURNOUT BY STAKEHOLDER STATUS



Area-Wide Stakeholder Status	
Community Interest	2,244
Live	20,372
Own	2,549
Work	1,657
Total	26,822